Climactic events in world history are usually properly recorded; the beginnings are often veiled in the mists of time long past.

Where, for instance, was the artist when Jean Baptiste Le Moyne, Sieur de Bienville, first staked out the site that was to become the City of New Orleans? Or where was he three years later when the engineers actually laid out the squares of the old town?

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Limning, most probably, the vapid face of a courtier at Versailles, or lolling in some garret in the Montmartre section.

And, in his absence, any descriptions of the actual founding of the Louisiana metropolis are limited to the brief, and sometimes inaccurate, writings of the day.

To fill up this visual void and to commemorate next year's 250th anniversary of the founding of the city, International House some months ago commissioned a canvas that would be a 20th Century interpretation of that long-ago ground-breaking.

The resulting painting is a far cry from the baroque elegance of early 18th Century art and is equally removed from the classicism of the traditional historical style.

It is, instead, a fresh and entertaining statement, based on intensive research, but presented in a gay, half-sketchy, half-satirical vein.

Bienvenue, aware of the importance of the occasion, consciously takes the heroic stance; the engineers, more concerned with the mission's exigencies, discuss the survey problems before them.

Ordinary workmen busy themselves with cutting timber and driving stakes; a few sailboats glide along the river; and, out of the haze over the West Bank, the mind's eye can make out a suggestion of present-day Algiers.

The artist, who spent some weeks in New Orleans absorbing the feeling of the locale, is Elek Kanarek, a Polish-American and a noted portrait and mural painter.

His painting joins a growing collection of International House art—works assembled from many corners of the world to help that organization in its promotion of "world peace, trade and understanding."

IH managing director Paul Fabry, who believes strongly that cultures are best interpreted through their visual arts, points with pride to IH gems that have come from such diverse times and places as 16th Century Holland, 17th Century China, 18th Century India and 20th Century America.

The first piece to enter this collection was a large pre-Gobelin French tapestry believed to have been woven in Paris around 1620. Its subject is a classic one, based on the story of Artemisia, 4th Century B.C. queen of Caria, and the tomb that she had built for her husband, Mausolus.

The IH hanging, which is one of a series designed in deference to the widowhood of Catherine de Medicis, was a gift from A. Quisgaard Petersen of this city. Two of its mates are in the Delgado Museum of Art.
Most of the other art objects in the International House collection were acquired during the last five years. Many were purchased by IH missions to the various countries; a few have been gifts from consuls; and a pair of carvings, mounted on the newels of the grand staircase, were commissioned from Mexican-American sculptor Enrique Alferez.

One of the more important of the works is an 18th Century temple carving, once coveted by the British Museum of London. This piece, which comes from the Kerala region, is a large wooden head representing one of the deities in the Hindu hierarchy. It still has traces of a polychrome material that once covered it; the British Museum gave up its option only on finding a similar work where more of the original coloring was intact.

One wall of Fabry's office is presently devoted to a series of rare 16th Century etchings depicting the Dutch and Portuguese explorers who visited India and China in that age of expansion. The prints are the work of Dutch engraver Linschoten; Fabry feels that they have both artistic and historic value.

The most serene of the works is a polychromed wooden Goddess of Mercy from 17th Century China. This conception of a female Buddha holds her hands out in blessing—she is truly a symbol of international peace.

Two small, but very fine, 18th Century baroque carvings—Mary and Joseph—evince the same feelings of godlike love and amity. They were created in the storied Austrian capital, Vienna.

Though purchased in New Orleans, a handsome School of Guido Reni "The Chaste Suzanne" attests to Italian genius; a circa 1700 Venetian landscape shows another facet of Italian art.

The list of the fine, the curious and the decorative pieces in the IH collection is too long to enumerate. It's sufficient to say that there are both old and new works from Latin America, Australia, Poland, Japan and a dozen other regions.

Last, but not least, there is an old clock from Switzerland which is as abstract and as exciting as a piece of contemporary sculpture.

The IH collection, like one in a home, is displayed with casual grace throughout the building.

The "Bienville Founding New Orleans" canvas will be installed on a Grand Hall wall now devoted to a listing of delinquent members.

Fabry smiles as he gently explains that this placement will solve another problem, "Members can simply no longer afford to be delinquent in their dues!"